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ABSTRACT

A study examined whether published texts and studies being used in the speech communication classroom adequately address the needs of students when they go into the laboratory setting of forensic tournaments. Published studies in speech communication, selected textbooks used in the basic speech course, and selected studies and textbooks in forensics were reviewed. Results indicated that: (1) the communication education literature does little to provide insight on the impact of the competitive setting on speech anxiety; (2) the recommendations for controlling speech anxiety found in most of the selected textbooks (positive mental attitude, eating a balanced diet, abstaining from drug usage) apply to the forensic context; and (3) forensics textbooks and studies have not specifically addressed the topic of controlling speech anxiety. (Two tables of data are included; 43 references are attached.) (RS)

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Controlling Speech Anxiety:

Academic Recommendations and Forensic Applications

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CONTROLLING SPEECH ANXIETY: ACADEMIC RECOMMENDATIONS AND FORENSIC APPLICATIONS

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American, or western-style colleges and universities, traditionally rely upon out-of-context learning. That is, students acquire information and learn in a setting that is quite different from that in which the knowledge is applied (Klopf, 121). In speech communication, we ask students to learn and practice communication concepts and skills in a classroom and expect our students to use their speaking abilities in a variety of contexts. Forensic tournaments is one of those contexts where speech concepts and skills can be applied. However, what is taught in the classroom and what is practiced in the laboratory setting, or in this case, the forensic tournament, may not always be aligned.

The tenets of communication that are applicable to forensics, and being addressed in the published textbooks and studies, are many; and our purpose is not to explore all of them in this essay. However, one is of particular interest to us because it deals with an experience that transcends both the in- and out-of-context situations: How should students deal with speech anxiety or the stresses associated with public speaking?

Students competing in forensic tournaments are concerned about variables that cause anxiety or stress. Littlefield and Sellnow (1992) identified these concerns through seven items contributing to anxiety levels at tournaments: Not enough time in the tournament schedule; reduction in the intake of nutritious foods and beverages; reduction in sleep; increased levels of stress; reduced opportunities for adequate exercise; increased chance for illness; and increased consumption of drugs (pp. 6-8). Some might suggest that the stressors we identified affect, in negative ways, the performance levels of forensic students.

Because not all students who participate in forensics major in speech communication, they must rely upon their instructors to use the published communication and forensic studies, as well as the public speaking

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textbooks, for advice on how to deal with these factors causing anxiety in the forensic tournament context. Realistically, coming from all majors as they do, students often rely on Introduction to Public Speaking courses as their primary vehicle for being exposed to, and learning how to deal with, speech anxiety. Our focus on this paper is to explore the question: What advice are we giving our forensic students about dealing with speech anxiety? In other words, do the published texts and studies being used in the speech communication classroom adequately address the needs of students when they go into the laboratory setting of forensic tournaments?

In our search to find the sources of information available for forensic students with speech anxiety questions or problems, we chose to examine three sources: Published studies in speech communication; selected textbooks used in the basic speech course; and selected studies and textbooks in forensics. Our purpose in reviewing these sources was to determine what information is provide about dealing with speech anxiety and/or stress and to postulate if we are providing the information in our classrooms that is needed by our students when dealing with the out-of-context experiences they encounter at forensic tournaments. The following discussion provides an overview of selected perspectives.

SELECTED PUBLISHED STUDIES IN SPEECH COMMUNICATION

Weissberg and Lamb (1977) provided a reasonable way of categorizing speech anxiety research that is useful today. They claimed that speech anxiety research focuses on how speech anxiety is measured, treated, and related to broader conceptualizations of anxiety (p. 27). In a general review of speech anxiety literature since 1977, Littlefield, et al. (1989), found that all three issues were still emphasized in the literature.

For example, studies by Bourhis and Allen (1992), Behnke, Sawyer and King (1987), and Ayers (1986), serve to demonstrate a continued concern with how speech anxiety is defined and measured. Studies exploring the relationship of speech anxiety to broader conceptualizations of apprehension have focused largely on the distinction between situational and trait-like variables (Beatty & Friedland, 1990; Beatty, Balfantz & Kuwabara, 1989; Beatty, 1988). Of greatest use in this study is the research regarding recommended treatments for speech anxiety.

The suggestions for treating speech anxiety vary. Connel and Borden (1987) concluded that desensitization and cognitive modification, two treatment techniques that receive a great deal of attention in the literature, are useful for speech instructors attempting to reduce speech anxiety in their students. Littlefield and Sellnow (1987) argued that further research be conducted regarding the use of self-disclosure to reduce speech anxiety in the public speaking class. Ayers (1988) offers support for the use of positive thinking, in the form of visualization, to cope with speech anxiety. He found that students who were trained to use visualization had lower speech anxiety during an informative speech than those who were not trained. Booth-Butterfield (1988) indicated that state or situational anxiety may be reduced "by offering strong rewards for communication in class and, especially, public settings" (p. 222). He also suggested that the avoidance of students with low speech anxiety and the state anxiety of students with high communication can be reduced by allowing students to work with acquaintances. Pelias and Pelias (1988) found that, in the basic performance of literature course, students with low communication apprehension may perceive themselves as apprehensive, but still rate the performance experience positively. Conversely, students with high speech anxiety are more likely to see the apprehension as an incapacitating problem that makes performing literature a tense and unrewarding experience. Two additional studies addressed issues related to the treatment of speech anxiety. Pelias (1989) examined twenty-five public speaking textbooks to determine how the subject of communication apprehension was addressed in contemporary texts. She found that none of the information in these texts was inaccurate. However, much of it was dated and derived from non-academic sources. Booth-Butterfield and Cottone (1991) argued that efforts to reduce speech anxiety in students may border on psychological treatment. Consequently, they suggested that a code of ethics ought to be created for the treatment of students with speech anxiety by people in the communication discipline.

Summary

The communication education literature offers a variety of means for coping with speech anxiety. Desensitization and self-disclosure would be difficult coping strategies for contestants to implement in a competitive setting. Conversely, positive thinking, visualization, and rewards are all potential means for reducing anxiety in forensic competition. As Table 1 illustrates, all of these strategies deal with stress,

attitude, and relaxation. The problem for competitors, as Littlefield and Sellnow (1992) suggested, is that the tournament context intensifies stress and limited opportunities for relaxation.

Table 1
Specific Speech Apprehension Strategies Addressed
in Communication Education Research: 1986-1992

Topics	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Desensitization	X					X	X	
Self-Disclosure	X					X	X	
Visualization	X					X	X	
Rewards	X					X	X	
Ethics								

Legend: 1=stress; 2=exercise; 3=illness; 4=drugs; 5=sleep; 6=attitude; 7=relaxation; 8=nutrition

All of the research described above is limited to a stress that is generated by the contestant's thoughts related to delivering a speech. What is lacking in this literature is advice for coping with speech anxiety that is stimulated by variables within the competitive context. Visualization, for example, will do little to overcome the anxiety associated with a compressed schedule. Similarly, desensitization is not likely to help a competitor cope with deficiencies in nutrition or sleep. In short, the communication education literature does little to provide insight on the impact of the competitive setting on speech anxiety.

SELECTED PUBLIC SPEAKING TEXTBOOKS

Textbooks used in the basic speech course are an additional source of information about measuring speech anxiety, identifying strategies for coping with anxiety, and relating speech anxiety to other communication situations. Through a review of thirteen textbooks for topics related to speech anxiety or apprehension, eight general categories reflecting strategies for coping with speech anxiety were identified: Sleep, relaxation, attitude, nutrition, stress, exercise, illness, and drugs. These categories can be characterized, operationally, as follows:

SLEEP: Getting a good night's sleep before the speaking experience to be physically and mentally prepared.

ATTITUDE:	A positive change in attitude, or "speaking with a sense of confidence" in speech when preparing and delivering a speech.
RELAXATION:	In order to reduce stress, breathing exercises are offered as strategies to gain composure.
NUTRITION:	Eating a balanced diet, and eating lightly prior to the speaking experience helps to prepare the speaker physically.
STRESS:	Anxiety, or apprehension that is felt before and during the speaking experience.
EXERCISE:	In order to reduce stress, a regular exercise routine may help speaker to cope with speech anxiety.
ILLNESS:	Extreme levels of anxiety or stress may lead to minor illnesses, such as upset stomach or headaches.
DRUGS:	Including caffeine-filled beverages, alcohol, and any mind-altering substances are not recommended during speech preparation or presentation.

These categories are consistent with the study conducted by Littlefield and Sellnow (1992) which examined the behaviors of participants in forensic tournament competition.

Table 2
Topics Addressed in Basic Course Textbooks

Text	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1		X			X			
2		X	X		X			
3	X	X	X		X			
4		X			X			
5		X			X			
6		X			X			
7	X		X		X		X	
8		X			X			
9	X	X			X			
10	X	X		X	X			X
11		X			X			
12			X		X			
13		X			X			

Legend:

Texts		Categories	
1	Ayers and Miller	A	Sleep
2	Beebe and Beebe	B	Attitude
3	Brilhart, et al.	C	Relaxation
4	Devito	D	Nutrition
5	Gronbeck, et al.	E	Stress
6	Hanna and Gibson	F	Exercise
7	Koch	G	Illness
8	Logue, et al.	H	Drugs
9	Lucas		
10	Makay		
11	Osborn and Osborn		
12	Samovar and Mills		
13	Verderber		

Stress

All of the thirteen texts mentioned stress as a major factor felt before and during the speaking experience. These feelings of nervousness, were described in all texts as a major factor inhibiting creative in speech building, and delivery. Therefore, many of the texts offered suggestions under the heading of

"speaking confidently" (Logue, et al., 1992; and Brilhart, et al., 1992). Furthermore, texts identified stress with such labels as "anxiety" (Koch, 1992; Beebe and Beebe, 1992; Hanna and Gibson, 1992; and Ayers and Miller, 1990), "nervousness" (Osborn and Osborn, 1991; Verderber, 1991; and Lucas, 1992), and "stage fright" (Samovar and Mills, 1992; Gronbeck, et al., 1990; and Makay, 1992). Each text offered suggestions to help students cope with the stresses inherent in public speaking.

Attitude

A change in attitude reduces speech anxiety. The speaker's attitude about her/himself, the speaking situation, and the audience often results in negative opinions about public speaking (Logue, et al., 1992). Several texts suggested that developing confidence in front of a group, is necessary for developing a positive attitude. By incorporating positive "self-talk" techniques, a student develops a positive attitude (Gronbeck, et al., 1990). Other texts suggested visualizing a positive speech experience, resulting in speaker confidence (Hanna and Gibson, 1992; Ayers and Miller, 1990). Scheduling a speech at a time that is psychologically best for the speaker helps a student to gain confidence (Verderber, 1991).

Relaxation

Reducing stress often results in a strong, coherent speech performance. Breathing exercises were offered as a strategy to help gain composure (Koch, 1992; Samovar and Mills, 1992; Brilhart, 1992; Beebe and Beebe, 1992; and Devito, 1990). Deep, regular diaphragmatic breathing exercises induce a state of relaxation prior to the speech (Samovar and Mills, 1992).

Sleep

In order to reduce apprehension, a speaker needs to be physically able and mentally sharp. Vocal delivery demands a quick and confident mind. Many texts suggest that getting a good night's sleep before the speaking experience prepares the speaker physically and mentally (Koch, 1992; Brilhart, et al., 1992; Makay, 1992; and Lucas, 1992). Not staying up until early hours in the morning writing the speech, and expecting to speak effectively is not a recommended speaking strategy (Lucas, 1992).

Nutrition

Another way a speaker can be mentally and physically prepared to given an effective speech is to eat

a balanced diet. Makay (1992) suggested the importance of a balanced diet in speech preparation. It was further suggested that eating lightly before a speech was better than eating a big meal, because after a big meal, most people feel lethargic (Makay, 1992).

Illness

Extreme levels of anxiety or stress may lead to minor illnesses, such as upset stomachs or headaches. Some students become so overwhelmed prior to the speaking experience they become physically ill. A speaker's physical health may be affected by stage fright (Koch, 1992) resulting in an inability to give the speech.

Drugs

In order to maintain mental sharpness, Makay (1992) suggests avoiding caffeine-filled beverages, alcohol, and any mind-altering substances prior to the speech.

Summary

Most of the selected textbooks focused on how a positive mental attitude can reduce speech anxiety. The textbook authors generally agreed that a student needs to be physically and mentally prepared for the speaking experience. According to some texts, this meant preparing physically by getting a good night's sleep before the speaking experience, inducing relaxation by breathing deeply, eating a balanced diet, and abstaining from drug usage. These recommendations apply to the forensic context.

FORENSIC TEXTBOOKS AND PUBLISHED STUDIES

Prior to Hindman, Shackelford, and Schlottach's textbook entitled, Working Forensics: A Competitor's Guide (1991), few suggestions have been available for coaches and students seeking ways to deal with speech anxiety. Perhaps more problematic for the discipline is the absence of advice based upon research. The Buys (1965) series on oratory, extemporaneous speaking, and other individual events provided few anecdotal suggestions, such as: "be on time, be prepared, be well-dressed, and be well-rested" (Extemporaneous Speaking, 1965, p. 27). These pamphlets were later copyrighted as The Creative Speaking Series (1972). However, they did not include any additional insight into speech anxiety for forensic students or their coaches. Klopf (1982) did not address the topic of speech anxiety in his textbook, Coaching &

Directing Forensics. Faules, Rieke, and Rhodes (1976) suggested ways in which a coach could keep a good perspective about forensics. However, as far as helping students to recognize and overcome speech anxiety, this textbook was also lacking. Specialized coaching textbooks, such as Forensic Tournaments: Planning and Administration (Goodnight and Zarefsky, 1980) excluded the topic of speech anxiety. Buys and Copeland (1985) came at the topic of speech anxiety from the vantage point of non-competitive speech activities. In their concise way, they built the argument that self-confidence can be built through positive experiences. Littlefield and Littlefield (1987) furthered the position that building positive experiences is essential when working with children in elementary school programs.

In contrast to these earlier forensic texts, Hindman, Shackelford, and Schlottach (1991) included two major sections in their book dealing with the topic of speech anxiety. In a section entitled, "Survival Skills," topics such as time management, learning to accept criticism, and learning how to manage anxiety through breathing exercises, concentration, and relaxation are developed (pp. 24-39). Later in the book, they focused more specifically on the previously identified topics related to speech anxiety: getting enough sleep, using "self-talk" to relax, keeping a positive attitude about winning, eating the right foods, developing mental toughness to deal with the stress of competition, exercising regularly, getting medical help when sick and staying away from sick colleagues, and avoiding drugs (pp. 300-309). Based upon the practical experience of its authors, the weakness of this textbook is the absence of theory-based research to support their suggestions.

The topic of dealing with speech anxiety has been absent from most of the published research in forensic journals. Dean's (1990) review of articles dealing with forensic pedagogy suggested that while debate has a greater emphasis in the literature, pedagogy "directed towards individual events is especially lacking" (29). Of the twenty-seven articles on individual events cited, all were event-specific and dealt with coaching strategies; none identified ways for dealing with speech anxiety. Logue and Shea (1990) used the Developmental Conferences on Individual Events, along with the work of other forensic scholars, to justify the forensic activity as an educational laboratory for the discipline. However, through their review, they found that coaching strategies, rather than speech anxiety and other basic issues facing the student moving

from the classroom to the forensic tournament situation, were the focus of published research.

Summary

While most speech communication educators and forensic coaches would agree that learning to cope with speech anxiety is an important hurdle for students to cross, forensic textbooks and studies have not specifically addressed the topic. Adding to this, is the reliance upon anecdotal suggestions, rather than theory, as a basis for the limited information available dealing with speech anxiety.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The communication education literature provides useful information for students seeking help to reduce the speech anxiety related to their attitudes about speaking in forensic competition. However, the literature does not address stress we identified in the competitive context. Further research regarding the situational anxiety fostered by forensic tournaments is essential if we, as forensic coaches and administrators, want to justify our activity as a laboratory experience for our students.

We expected that the textbooks used in basic public speaking courses would address the topic of speech anxiety. While the selected textbooks we reviewed did present suggestions about dealing with speech anxiety, there were several situational constraints identified in the forensic context that were not addressed; specifically, the need for nutrition, exercise, and healthful behaviors, and avoidance of drugs.

The absence of suggestions for dealing with speech anxiety in forensic textbooks and published studies may be based, in part, upon the assumption that this topic is being dealt with elsewhere. However, as this review suggests, we cannot depend upon the communication education literature, or public speaking textbooks as they are currently being written, to provide the insights and solutions needed in the competitive out-of-context learning environment. Instead, forensic educators must take on the responsibility for investigating the relationship between speech anxiety and the contest setting.

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